

Exhibit 7

ESPN CHL Lawsuit Article

Lawsuit: Junior hockey violates antitrust law



Tisha Thompson, ESPN
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A union representing junior hockey players is suing the NHL, the Canadian Hockey League and its affiliated junior hockey leagues and clubs, alleging the development system for professional prospects violates antitrust laws.

The North America division of the World Association of Icehockey Players Unions said in its class-action filing that hockey's professional leagues operate what it called a cartel, allowing the "systematic exploitation and abuse" of junior players. The lawsuit was filed Wednesday in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

The lawsuit names the Ontario Hockey League (OHL), the Western Hockey League (WHL), the Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League (QMJHL) -- all members of the CHL -- and more than 140 member clubs connected to the NHL and its major junior leagues.

"We have just been made aware of the complaint, filed by WAIPU, an organization that has not been certified to represent any CHL players," the CHL said in a statement. "Until we can thoroughly review the document, we are unable to provide comment as to the legitimacy of its contents."

The NHL did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

According to the lawsuit, the leagues suppress the rights of junior players by divvying up geographic territories, recruiting exclusively from those areas, and allowing teams to sign the exclusive rights to employ the player for his entire junior career. The lawsuit states the leagues operate a draft without a collective-bargaining agreement for players and restrict players' pay for name, image and likeness. All of this, the lawsuit states, "artificially [reduces]" compensation and restricts competition for junior players.

Junior players "have been historically fearful of challenging these illegal agreements because of the risk that doing so would jeopardize their careers and perhaps eliminate

their chances of ever competing in the NHL," according to the complaint.

A player "forever waives his NCAA eligibility and is barred from playing college hockey, regardless of how many games (if any) he skates in a Major Junior League," the filing states. "This remains the case even after NCAA schools began allowing their athletes to share in NIL licensing revenues."

The labor group alleges that leagues' rules have allowed them to illegally underpay players. WHL players are paid \$250 a month, while OHL players are paid \$470 a month, according to the filing. The filing also alleges that each player's NIL rights are assigned to his team, which does not share any subsequent proceeds with players.

The NHL exerts control over the leagues by providing "annual funding" to the junior leagues and "substantial payments" to each club, paying teams as much as \$175,000 per player selected in the NHL draft, according to the complaint.

"No other developmental league in North America receives similar payments and funding from the NHL," the complaint states.

Many European prospects, in comparison, play in the NHL's two developmental hockey leagues -- the American Hockey League (AHL) and the East Coast Hockey League (ECHL).

The lawsuit states AHL pays its players \$5,000 a month, while ECHL pays \$2,800 a month. Players in both leagues are also represented by a CBA, according to the complaint. But the AHL and ECHL have agreed not to compete for the junior league players, "further reducing competition," according to the complaint.

Following a separate class-action lawsuit filed against the CHL in 2020, which alleged players were subject to bullying, hazing, sexual abuse, and other physical and psychological abuse, the CHL appointed an independent review panel to review its practices. That panel found a "code of silence" that prevents players from reporting misconduct.

Wednesday's lawsuit is asking the court for damages and three injunctions; one that will effectively end all of these practices, another that will prevent future drafts without a CBA,

and a third against any league that boycotts a junior player who complains about league practices or participates in the lawsuit.